

# Let our Younger in Society learn to Adore and Venerate their Elders

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We Sri Lankans are legitimate heirs to the culture of Buddhism which was introduced to this island twenty three centuries ago by the most venerated Thera Mahinda who was none other than the son of the great world renowned Emperor Asoka of India. For the contribution he made towards the cultural development of this island, he came to be honoured by the later generations with the title Illuminator of the Island or *Dīpa-pajjotaka*. It is also to be remembered that Buddhism is no mere religion which promises birth in a heavenly realm as a reward for submission to or adoration of any unknown or unseen divine powers.

Buddhism's concern is to relieve humans of the ills of life to which they are subject on account of being caught up in the whirlpool of *samsāric* continuance, of being hurled from birth to death and being born again and again. This goal which is called Nirvāna [Pali *Nibbāna*] is the transcendence from the human to one of superhuman, possibly in this very life time. This escalation needs intense culture and cultivation of our very human nature which is far from being spiritually oriented. We humans are far too earthbound, prone more to satisfy our sensory demands. Some modern thinkers, including American psychologists among them, also critically view this pattern of human behaviour and introduce a corrective stimulation with the phrase "delay gratification." A very natural veil of ignorance clouds our vision [*avijjā nīvaraṇānaṃ*]. We are equally bonded to this cycle of existence on account of our inherent process of craving [*taṇhā sanyojanānaṃ sattānaṃ*].

This culture or nurture of the human to the level of superhuman is the main burden of Buddhism as a religion. This is achieved entirely through development to perfection of the potentiality of wisdom [*paññā*] latent in the human. This

ascent is called trans-worldly or *lokiya* to *lokuttara*. Then man is elevated above the limitations of time and space.

The average worldling is regarded as being uninitiated and untutored. He is a stranger to the Buddhist way of culture, both secular and religious. He is therefore called *assutavā puthujjano* or illiterate commoner. It is on getting acquainted with the *dhamma* through the instructions of another [*parato ghoso*] and through one's own personal scrutiny of its contents [*yoniso ca manasikāro*] that one comes to acquire *sammā diṭṭhi* or corrected vision in terms of Buddhism. This is unquestionably the first step on the ascending stairway called the Noble Eightfold Path or *Ariyo Aṭṭhaṅgiko Maggo* leading up to *sammā samādhi* which is the eighth step and the last on the Path. Hereafter it is through the ninth step of perfected wisdom or *sammā ñāṇa* which is no less than a product of *sammā samādhi* [*sammā samādhissa sammā ñāṇaṃ pahoti*] that one reaches the final or tenth stage of *sammā vimutti* or *arahanthood*.

Quite apart and distinct from this Eightfold Path there exists in Buddhist religious culture a larger and totally comprehensive perimeter called the Threefold Culture or *tisso sikkhā*. This includes within it the Eightfold Path but not *vice versa*, i.e. the Eightfold Path cannot contain within it the Threefold Culture or *tisso sikkhā* which is much more extensive. We have already shown above that it needs ten steps to lead an ordinary worldling to Nirvāna. Lamentably this has far too often been misunderstood by writers on Buddhism.

At any rate, let us now take a look at the basic importance of *sikkhā* in Buddhist religious life. It literally means the training of oneself. Its verbal form *sikkhati* means trains, nurtures and cultures. In its threefold division as *tisso sikkhā*, it covers the entire range of development of a human from the mundane to the transcendental. People generally use the term divine to indicate this ascent. We do not, because we maintain that humans achieve it, while being human, through the power latent within themselves and through their own endeavour.

The first stage of this culture for the humans is the gradual training in moral goodness of man or *sīla*. This is religious [or call it spiritual if you choose] but it is basic and down to earth. It involves no subordination of man to any divinity or divine power. The smallest unit of this category of personal culture via moral goodness is what is known as *pañca-sīla*. Its contents are widely known as 1. Universal respect for all forms of life, 2. Respect for the ownership of legitimately acquired property of others, 3. Wholesome relationship of genders, of men and women, married or unmarried, without violence to norms of accepted social propriety, 4. Honesty in transactions at all levels, public or private, individual or collective and finally, 5. The need to maintain sanity of judgement at all times by abstaining from use of alcohol and drugs. The violation of these, on the one hand, brings about dread and fear in society [*pañca bhayāni*] and spiritual corrosion within the individual [*pañca verāni*] on the other.

From this larger societal unit, we now move to the smaller one of the family. As in the ancient Indian concept of the extended family, in Buddhist thinking too, we discover three clear segments of the father and the mother of the family proper, their parents on both sides, as well as the children of the central unit. The grand parents, with their wisdom acquired through age and experience, provide more or less the model role. The main responsibility of running the home rests with the mother and the father, not only as the progenitors of the new generation, but also as the pilots who guide them in life through all vicissitudes. The mother and the father [*mātā* and *pitā*] are the highest venerated persons in the home. They are identified with Brahmā, i.e. the highest divinity in Indian religion [*Brahmā' ti mātāpitaro*]. They are also the first and primary educators [*pubbācariyā ' ti vuccare*]. Their love towards their progeny is unquestionable [*pajāya anukampakā*].

With the concept of the extended family, the Buddhists bring in closer together a host of other members who are diversely related to the family whose seniority in age commands respect from the younger fellow members. This is

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 specially listed under Buddhist ethics as *vuddhāpacāyana* or *kule jetthāpacāyī* i.e. the younger venerate the elders in their community who are held in very high esteem.

We look forward to the possibility of getting together at the Narada Center on a Saturday or Sunday afternoon with some of the very distinguished persons in the city we could gather, both male and female, who have rendered tremendous service to our Sri Lankan community, and have brought great honour to our land. We also plan to invite groups of senior students from our leading educational institutions in the neighbourhood to come. The younger would meet the older, serve them with food and drinks we plan to provide and respectfully attend on them. This would indeed be for the benefit of the younger.

We wish to do this as an honest endeavour to restore the fast vanishing virtue of RESPECT back into our society. In the world today, and in the U.S.A. in particular, let me inform you that respect is the first of the 3 R's taught in the schools, dumping as it were into the garbage bin the outmoded triad of Reading, Riting and Rithmatics. Sri Lankan leaders, leaders in every area of life, need to awaken themselves to these. We wish these words fall with a loud-enough ring on the ears of our educationists in the land and the parents whom we would call upon to take a keener interest on the growth and development of their children, and not merely let them acquire skills of hands and feet, with a view to gathering more and more money, faster and faster.